

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 /082 W
-----098542 311353Z /53

R 310735Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6620
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0536

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: P I N T L E
SUBJ: SECURITY SITUATION IN SIDON

1. RESIDENTS OF SIDON STAGED A DAY-LONG GENERAL STRIKE
ON JANUARY 28 TO PROTEST THE LACK OF SECURITY IN THE CITY.
SHOPS AND CAFES WERE CLOSED AND SCATTERED DEMONSTRATIONS
WERE STAGED TO DEMAND THAT THE STATE PUT AN END TO THE
RASH OF INCIDENTS, INCLUDING PROTECTION RACKETS, FREQUENT
SHOOT-OUTS, AND ATTACKS ON LAW ABIDING CITIZENS.

2. AT AN EMERGENCY MEETING ON THE SAME DAY, REPRESENTATIVES
OF VARIOUS LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN GROUPS IN SIDON
INCLUDING THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT, THE ARAB LIBERATION FRONT,
THE PFLP, THE PDFLP, THE FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF
PALESTINE (FLP) AND SAIQA ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT
CALLING FOR:

--THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL ARMED ELEMENTS FROM THE
STREETS OF THE OLD QUARTER OF SIDON;
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--THE BANNING OF THE CARRYING OF WEAPONS BY ANY
MILITARY GROUP IN THE STREETS OF SIDON.

3. THE MOST RECENT INCIDENT, WHICH PROMPTED THE GENERAL
STRIKE, WAS A TWO-DAY GUN BATTLE ON JANUARY 27-28 BETWEEN
THE IRAQI BACKED FLP AND PRO-SYRIAN FEDAYEEN, WHICH BEGAN

WHEN THE FLP TRIED TO OPEN AN OFFICE IN THE OLD QUARTER, ACCORDING TO AN EMBASSY SOURCE. THE PRO-SYRIAN FEDAYEEN RESPONDED BY ATTACKING THE FLP FIGHTERS AND FORCING THEM TO WITHDRAW. OTHER UNIDENTIFIED FIGHTERS USED THE OCCASION TO DYNAMITE THE SHOPS OF SOME CHRISTIANS IN THE OLD CITY, THE SAME SOURCE REPORTED.

4. COMMENT: NEITHER THE SYRIAN ARMY NOR LEBANESE AUTHORITIES ARE PREPARED OR ABLE TO MAINTAIN SECURITY IN THE OLD QUARTER OF SIDON, WHICH PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS HAVE CONTROLLED SINCE THE END OF FIGHTING IN 1976. DESPITE THE JOINT STATEMENT, MANY PEOPLE ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THE VARIOUS PALESTINIAN FACTIONS WILL COOPERATE IN MAINTAINING ORDER OVER ANY APPRECIABLE LENGTH OF TIME. END COMMENT.
LANE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SECURITY, GENERAL STRIKES, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, URBAN AREAS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BEIRUT00536
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780046-0100
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t1978016/aaaaaebh.tel
Line Count: 78
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f08f63e3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3768729
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECURITY SITUATION IN SIDON
TAGS: PINT, LE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f08f63e3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014